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SOME PROBLEMS OF SOUTHERN ECONOMIC HISTORY¹

THERE are four primary factors in Southern economic history—the institution of slavery, the negro, the white man and physiography. Within the limits of this paper I shall only attempt to suggest certain lines of thought which have occurred to me in connection with a study of the relative influence of these factors in the economic life of the Southern States.

The time has come when we must study slavery as an economic institution without regard to its ethical or political aspects. I do not mean at all that the latter are to be ignored, but simply that the different phases must be considered separately, if we are ever to ascertain the actual effect of slavery upon the purely industrial side of Southern history. It must be studied as dispassionately as the history of the tariff is studied. Looked at from its economic side, we find at present certain fairly definite attitudes assumed by historians toward the institution. These views have become crystallized into traditions, and are accepted as mere matters of course by nearly all modern writers on ante bellum conditions.

Under this traditional treatment slavery is held responsible for everything in Southern economic life and development which in any way differed from the economic life and development of the non-slaveholding states. For example: it is traditionally responsible for the fact that foreign immigration did not seek the South; for the fact that Southern manufacturing enterprise lagged behind that of the rest of the country; to it was attributed an alleged contempt for manual labor on the part of white people, which brought labor into disrepute and prevented white people from doing their share of such work; the difference between the respective values of Northern and Southern farm-lands, and the wasting of the latter, were charged to slavery; the use of crude and heavy farming implements was considered an inevitable incident of slave labor, hence also the backwardness of the South in adopting improved farm machinery.

¹ In condensed form this paper was read at the Madison meeting of the American Historical Association, December, 1907. It is an outgrowth of the writer's work as a collaborator of the Department of Economics and Sociology of the Carnegie Institution. For many courtesies I am indebted to Mr. C. S. Sloane, of the Bureau of the Census, and to Miss E. L. Yeomans for the tabulation and verification of figures.

The catalogue could be almost indefinitely extended. All these things were the result of slave labor, ergo, if slavery were abolished such conditions would disappear and under the stimulus of free labor we should see the South approximate the economic life of the North. Slavery was abolished, the South has made tremendous progress, and the predictions of ante bellum writers and travellers have been fulfilled.

My position is that in the first place we do not yet know enough about the internal economic conditions of the ante bellum South to say just what the exact status of such development was at a given period. One of the problems which confronts the student is to lay the foundation of a real knowledge of Southern ante bellum economic life. In the second place, I question the validity of the proof that the economic progress of the South since the war has been more rapid than it would have been had slavery not been abolished. I also question the accuracy of the popularly accepted idea that there has been an economic revolution in the altered relative status of the South and the rest of the country since the Civil War. The common practice in considering the progress of the South is to lose sight of the even greater progress of the rest of the country. If the abolition of slavery caused the progress of the South, what caused the progress of the sections which had not felt "the economic blight of slavery"? The increased cotton production of the South since 1860 is no more attributable to the abolition of slavery than is the increased wheat production of the Northwest during the same period.

Again, if we find that there was a condition of relatively great economic backwardness in the South, to what is it to be attributed? The greatest problem in Southern economic history is that of determining the relative responsibility for its economic condition of the factors of race and of racial status. Was slavery primarily responsible, or was the fact that the slave was of a race of a normally low economic status?

Here we are confronted with the necessity of realizing the fact of a difference between slave labor and the slavery system. The economics of slave labor, *i. e.*, the labor per se, as controlled by a certain recognized system, has to do with the primary question of the adaptability of such labor to certain industrial pursuits, and with the secondary question of the purely productive efficiency of such labor in the fields to which it was adapted. The economics of slavery, *i. e.*, of the economic system developed for the control of a certain class of labor, has to do not only with the elementary

questions just stated but also with such further considerations as the ultimate and larger effect on the economic life of the community of the locking up of capital in controlled labor, the other avenues of employment which such capital might have found or developed, and the relative potential wealth-producing capacity of capital thus differently employed.

It is only after we have determined these questions that we can measure the relative importance in Southern economic development of the racial and institutional elements in Southern negro slavery. It is only then that we can even approximately determine the part played by slavery as an institution in the economic history of the South and of the nation.

I shall not attempt to answer these questions. I merely advance them as suggesting proper fields of inquiry for such students of Southern economic history as may not be willing longer to follow in the beaten path of those, however eminent, who have interpreted everything in Southern life in terms of a single economic institution.

But while I am not yet willing definitely to commit myself to certain tentative conclusions of my own, I recognize the propriety of suggesting some of the grounds upon which I venture to question the validity and accuracy of the accepted conclusions of others.

A stock argument of those who attack slavery on its economic side is the difference between the value of farm-lands in the slave and in the free states. Page 170 of the *Compendium of the Census of 1850* is a reference which is almost as sacred to some writers on slavery as the doctrine of predestination is to an old-school Presbyterian. Apparently, investigation stopped right there. We seem to have accepted as a matter of course that the contrary condition which was to follow abolition has been accomplished. As a matter of fact, the greatest decennial increase in Southern farm-land values which has occurred since 1850 was reached under slavery in 1860. In the latter year the average value per acre of farm-land and improvements was \$10.19 in the Southern States, \$23.68 in the New England States, and \$20.04 in the Central States.² After the expiration of forty years the value of Southern farm-lands had fallen in 1900 to \$8.96 per acre, while the New England States had increased to \$25.71, and the Central to \$37.52.

² Throughout this paper the states which are designated Southern are Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, including Indian Territory, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia and West Virginia. The Central are Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio and Wisconsin. The New England are Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Vermont.

One of the severest economic indictments drawn against the entire Southern industrial system by ante bellum writers, and one constantly repeated by present-day economists and historians, was that it retarded the development of manufacturing industry. In the growth of Southern manufactures in recent years, the Northern writer finds proof conclusive of the soundness of the ante bellum contention, while the Southern man concedes that in this respect at least the argument was incontrovertible. But here again for more than forty years we seem to have been content to accept surface indications as established proof.

If we concede the fact as to the ante bellum condition, where does responsibility for the condition properly fall, on slave labor or on the slavery system? If on the former, we are confronted with the fact that the abolition of slave labor did not alter the occupation of the slave. There were relatively no more negroes employed in manufacturing after emancipation than before. In fact the negro lost ground in some branches of manufacturing industry. At least a few cotton mills were operated with negro labor before the war, whereas no negroes are so employed today. With reference to slave labor, then, the class which were slaves have not been associated with the development of the one branch of manufacturing in which the South has made its greatest progress, while with reference to the slavery system neither responsibility nor absence of responsibility is clear. The history of ante bellum Southern manufacturing has not been written yet. When it is, evidence may be found to indicate that if its progress had not been checked by the war its development might easily have been as great under the continued existence of slavery as after its abolition. It was not a question of slavery, *per se*, but simply one of overcoming economic inertia, common to all long-established business conditions, and of accomplishing a diversion of capital into other channels. But even as the matter stood, the Southern States in 1860 contributed 12.5 per cent. of the total value of the manufactured products of the country.

As with manufactures, so with the important basic product of pig iron. We are still being told how impossible it was for the iron industry of the South to be developed with slave labor, while the growth of recent years is a matter of common knowledge. Yet we have the authority of Mr. Edwin C. Eckel, late of the United States Geological Survey, for the statement that the South today contributes a smaller percentage of the total American pig iron output than it did in 1854. In that year the Southern States con-

tributed 12 per cent. of the total. After numerous fluctuations during the intervening fifty-three years this had fallen in the first half of 1907 to 10.5 per cent.⁸

Here again we cross an apparently fixed tradition as to the economics of slavery, namely that this particular system of industrial organization was inherently limited to agricultural operations, and even to one specific type of such operations. Because mining was not a highly developed industry in the slave states, notwithstanding the existence of abundant mineral resources, the crude conclusion was that slavery was the cause behind the fact. There is no greater fallacy than this. Negro slave labor was originally transferred from Spain and gained its first foothold in America for the sole purpose of working the mines of Hispaniola. There is no warrant in fact for the opinion that mining would not have remained the chief occupation of such labor had the mines themselves not become exhausted. It is a feature of the natural economy of the earth that through the restricted distribution of minerals agriculture is a much more widely diffused, a much more general, industry than mining. It is a gratuitous assumption that slave labor is not as well adapted to the one as to the other. In so far as negro slave labor per se is concerned, we can still study it as applied to mining operations in the use of convicts in the coal-producing territory of Alabama and Tennessee. The mines of those states could have been developed as efficiently with the purchased and controlled labor of negro slaves in 1850 as with the purchased and controlled labor of negro convicts in 1900. The per capita production of one class would have equalled the production of the other, and this is the prime feature as far as the labor itself is concerned. As to whether the ton cost and profit of production would be greater or less under one system of control than under the other, or greater under a free labor system than either, is a question which concerns the relative ultimate advantages of the combined features of the respective systems, and should not be confused with the potential producing capacity of the labor itself.

Probably the greatest economic argument against slavery was that it caused immigrants to shun the Southern States. Thorold Rogers declared in 1888 that European immigration was worth £100,000,000 a year to the United States, and that slavery had deprived the ante bellum South of its share of this tremendously valuable importation. I know of no writer on the economic aspects

⁸ *Manufacturers' Record*, August 22, 1907, p. 145. The figures for the second half of the year were not available when Mr. Eckel wrote.

of Southern slavery, from Cairnes to Rhodes, who has not insisted upon the same explanation of the course of the tide of foreign immigration, which set away from the South. Yet in 1860 the Southern States contained 9.0 per cent. of the total foreign-born population of the country, while in 1900, thirty-five years after the removal of the commonly accepted ante bellum cause, the percentage had fallen to 5.2. In 1860, of the total population of the South 3.4 per cent. were of foreign birth, while in 1900 only 2.2 per cent. were foreign born. In 1860 the New England States contained 11.3 per cent. of the total foreign born of the country, and 14.0 per cent. in 1900. The Central group contained 36.8 per cent. of the total in 1860 and 35.3 per cent. in 1900. Of the total population of New England in 1860, 15 per cent. were foreign born, and in 1900, 25.8 per cent. Of the total population of the Central States 17.0 per cent. were of foreign birth in 1860, and 15.8 per cent. in 1900.

It is, however, more interesting to examine the respective numbers and rates of increase of the Southern foreign-born population, before and since the abolition of slavery, without reference to what existed or took place along the same line in other parts of the country. The actual number of foreign born in these states in 1850 was 231,494, and in 1860 it was 370,783. This represented an increase of slightly more than 60.0 per cent. of foreign born during the last decade of slavery. In 1900, forty years after 1860, the foreign-born population of the South was 539,756. This represented a gain during the thirty-five years succeeding the war only 29,684 in excess of the gain during the ten years which had preceded it. It represented an increase of only 45.5 per cent. during the post bellum generation, as against the 60.0 per cent. just stated for the ante bellum decade.

It is also worthy of consideration that the states of Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina and Tennessee contained a smaller foreign-born population in 1900 than in 1860. In these five Southern states the aggregate number of people of foreign birth was 46,137 greater five years before slavery was abolished than it was thirty-five years after. It is significant that during the period of this decline in the actual number of foreign-born white persons in these states, there was an increase of 1,386,421 negroes.

As between the economic condition of the South and other sections of the country, I believe that practically all, certainly the far greater part, of such differences as once existed and do now exist, aside from such as are inherent in soil and climate, were and are embraced in differences of population.

It is population which creates the artificial differences between a prairie-dog village on a barren waste in 1800 and a city of two millions on the same spot a century later. In less extreme illustration, but no less true, it is population which lies at the foundation of the artificial differences of economic and social condition between a Southern state with a density of 10.5 persons per square mile and a New England state with a density of 21. It is physically impracticable to develop a successful rural public-school system in a thinly settled country district in which the children are few and scattered, whereas it is entirely feasible in a section thickly populated. Yet how much easier and simpler it was for the traveller in the South in 1859 to charge the absence of rural schools to slavery, as the most obvious and novel feature of the landscape to the stranger, than to go to the real root of the matter and ascertain what were the actual controlling differentiating factors between the sections or the countries which he was contrasting. Charles Dickens sinned as greatly against the light and against common sense in criticizing and ridiculing America in contrast with England in 1842.

In 1830, a generation before the Civil War, the aggregate population of the Southern States was 6.4 persons to the square mile. At that time the density of the Central States was much less than the Southern, being but 3.6. In the same year New England averaged 31.5 persons to every square mile of its area. The Central group gained so rapidly on the Southern that at the end of the next decade, in 1840, their density was only .3 less than the latter, being 7.5 and 7.8 respectively. At no time since have the two been as close together. The New England States in 1840 had a density of 36.1. In 1860, New England had increased to 50.6 per square mile, the Central States to 20 and the Southern, Texas having been annexed, to 12.5. The density in the South at the outbreak of the Civil War was 19 per square mile less than that of New England thirty years before. Yet men wrote, and still write, as if all the ante bellum differences of development and growth between these two sections were solely attributable to the existence of slavery, per se, in one of them, and its non-existence in the other.

The census of 1900 showed a density of 90.2 persons in New England, 51.5 in the Central group and 27.4 in the Southern group. In other words, the aggregate population of the territory embraced within the Southern States in 1900 averaged 4.1 fewer persons per square mile than the population of New England averaged in 1830, seventy years before. The excess of density of New England over the South had increased in this seventy years from 25.1 persons in

1830 to 62.8 in 1900. The excess of the Southern over the Central group of 2.8 in 1830 was converted in 1900 to an excess of 24.1 in the Central over the Southern, and these figures are for the aggregate population of these groups. The differences are greatly increased if we consider their respective white populations alone. A statement of the respective densities by races also sharply emphasizes the numerical insignificance of the negro population in the New England and Central groups. With an aggregate density of 31.5 in 1830, New England's white density was 31.2. The aggregate and the white in the Central States was 3.6 and 3.5 respectively. In the South the total was 6.4, which fell to 3.9 with the negro eliminated. In 1860, New England's total of 50.6 remained 50.2 for the white; the Central's total of 20 was 19.6 for the white; the South's aggregate of 12.5 fell to 7.8 for the white. In 1900, the total negro and white densities, respectively, were for New England, 90.2 and 89.2; for the Central States 51.5 and 50.5; for the Southern 27.4 and 18.4.

This difference of density, both total and for whites only, suggests another important though wholly ignored consideration as between the South and other parts of the country, and one with which slavery was not concerned. We must go below the surface of mere figures of population, and even beyond the analysis of distribution and density, if we would grasp the true significance of the figures themselves in their relation to economic conditions.

In 1874 Dr. Edward Jarvis, of Massachusetts, delivered a suggestive address on the "Political Economy of Health".⁴ He stated the truism that "the effective force of the nation is not represented by the total number of the people, but by the number in the effective or producing age, and this is again qualified by the burden of supporting the dependent classes." He declared the strength of the state to be the sum of all its effective people, the strongest state being the one with the largest proportion of its people in "the sustaining period" of life, which he placed between the ages of twenty and seventy. He showed that in all the United States 49 per cent. of the white population were in the sustaining period of life, with 51 per cent. in the dependent class, while 44.78 per cent. of the colored population were supporters, against 55.22 per cent. of consumers. He found a wide difference between the Northern and Southern states in this vital respect. In Vermont the sustaining class was 53 per cent. and in Massachusetts, owing, he said, to im-

⁴ Edward Jarvis, "Political Economy of Health", pp. 335-338. (Reprinted from the *Fifth Annual Report of the Massachusetts State Board of Health*, Boston, 1874.)

migration in part, this class was 56.8 per cent. On the other hand, the sustaining classes in North and South Carolina were only 46 per cent., and but 47 per cent. in Georgia. He said that the proportion of the sustaining class in Massachusetts exceeded that of the white population of the Carolinas and Georgia by 38 per cent., while a comparison of the sustaining power with the burden laid upon it, showed the demand to be 50 per cent. greater on the whites of the Carolinas, and 60 per cent. greater on those of Georgia, than it was on the white population of Massachusetts.

There was probably no more eminent authority in the United States in his time than Dr. Jarvis, and I should hesitate to attempt to add anything to the value of his figures. But familiarity with the conditions of industrial organization in the South justifies me, in my own calculations, in changing the basis of comparison which he adopted. It seems to me fairer, and preferable, to make the inquiry on a basis of "wealth-creating", or "contributing", periods, rather than on an assumed self-sustaining period. Dr. Jarvis's maximum age limit of seventy years is sufficiently high for either purpose, but his minimum of twenty is not low enough for my inquiry. The necessity for agitation for child-labor legislation suggests that twenty years is too high a figure to adopt in such a calculation even in manufacturing states. In agricultural states it is certainly too high. This was peculiarly true of agriculture under the slave-labor system, a feature of which was that it provided some form of employment for nearly all ages. To be on safe ground, in studying the figures for 1860 and 1900, I have reduced Dr. Jarvis's minimum age to 15 years, and have considered such wealth-creating period as from 15 to 69 inclusive. For purposes of comparison only, as between different parts of the country, the net results suggest that his conclusions would hold as well with fifteen as with twenty.

In 1860, of the total population of the United States, 57.9 per cent. were within this contributing period; of the white population, 58.6 per cent. fell within it; of the negro, 54.0 per cent. In the Southern States 55.1 per cent. of the white population were in this period, as against 64.3 per cent. of the white population of New England. Of Southern negroes 53.7 per cent. were within these ages, as against 65.1 per cent. of the negroes of New England. In New England 64.3 per cent. of the total population were in this group, the same percentage as for the white population alone; in the South it contained 54.6 per cent. of the total population.

In 1900, of the total population of the country, 63.0 per cent.

were within the potential producing period of life; in the New England States 68.8 per cent. were within that period; in the South only 57.8 per cent. Thus the percentage in New England had increased from 64.3 per cent. to 68.8 per cent. while in the South it had increased from 54.6 per cent. to 57.8 per cent. Of the white population of the United States in 1900, 63.7 per cent. were within this period; with 68.7 per cent. of the whites of New England, and 58.6 per cent. of the Southern whites. Of the total negro population of the country, 60.6 per cent. fell within these ages, while the percentages of the total negro in New England and the South, respectively, were 81.9 and 56.7.

We see here the effect of the immigration of both foreign whites and native negroes to the New England States. The former gave to these states a large population of men and women in the wealth-creating and sustaining period of life. The immigrant who left Europe was neither the dependent child nor the helpless old man. And therein lies the greatest potential economic value of that class of population. It secures to a state, a section or a country a people within the ages of greatest productive activity. The contrast between the negro population of New England and of the South is even more marked. It suggests the effect of the immigration from the South of negroes who probably were in the self-supporting ages, and who left behind both the old and the young as burdens upon the negroes who remained. And the difference was more pronounced in 1900 than in 1860.

But the true significance of such figures in a study of the economic life and development of the Southern States relative to that of New England, to continue to use these two groups in comparison, can only be appreciated when we adopt Dr. Jarvis's mode of expressing the burden which the dependent classes were upon the contributing. This was done with his figures by ascertaining the number of persons in the dependent age for each 1000 persons within the sustaining ages. These dependent persons constitute the dead load which the sustaining class has to carry. He did not compare the sections as wholes, but, writing in 1874, he showed, for illustration, that the "burden" on the white population of Georgia was 60.0 per cent. greater than on the white population of Massachusetts.

Using our own figures, and comparing the dependents with the partly-sustaining or contributing group, we find that in the United States in 1860, for the total population, there were 728 dependent persons to each 1000 of contributing age. In the New England

States the number of dependents was 554, or 174 less than the number for the entire country; in the South the number was 832, or 104 more than for the entire country. In comparing the white population of the country and of the two sections, the contrast is emphasized. In the United States in 1860 there were 707 white dependents per 1000 of contributing age; in New England 554; in the Southern States 815. This difference becomes even more marked in the case of the negro population. The number of dependents in this class was 851 for the United States, 539 for New England, and 862 for the South.

By 1900 there was a reduction in the proportion of dependents of both races, in all sections of the country. But the decrease was greater for other sections than for the South, and the difference of burden as between the total population of the New England and the Southern States, was slightly greater than in 1860. The proportion of dependents to 1000 contributing, for the entire population in 1900, was 587; for New England it was 454; for the South it was 729. For the white population the number was 571 for the whole country, 456 for New England and 706 for the South. For the negro population there were 649 in the entire country, 223 in New England and 762 in the South.

Adopting Dr. Jarvis's method of expressing this difference of economic burden in percentages, we find that for the entire Southern population in 1860 the burden upon the wealth-producing portion was 50.2 per cent. greater than the burden upon the same portion of the population of the New England States. Comparing the white population of the two sections the burden was 46.8 per cent. greater in the South than in New England, while it was 59.9 per cent. greater upon the Southern negro population than upon the negroes of New England. The difference between the relative weights of this load, if I may so express it, had still further increased in 1900. For the total population it was 60.6 per cent. greater in the South than in New England, and 54.8 per cent. greater as between the respective white populations. The greatest increase, however, was on the negro population of the South, their burden of dependency being 241.7 per cent. greater than that upon the New England negro.

The significance of these figures, in comparing the economic condition of the South with that of any other section, or with the country as a whole, it seems to me, can hardly be ignored if we would attach its true value to each factor which contributes to regional or sectional differences. It is apparent that immigration

is partly responsible for the disparities which these figures indicate. How far climatic and health conditions are also responsible is simply another question which has to be answered, another problem for the student to solve.

For purposes of discussion we may admit the relative economic backwardness of the Southern States as compared with the Northern. There need be no debate over the matter of fact. The problem before us is that of locating the cause. This challenges consideration of another question which we shall some day have to answer, no matter how long it may be obscured and postponed. This is: Was the fundamental difference between the economic development and history of the Northern and Southern States, respectively, down to 1861, a difference between two *systems* of labor, plus the natural differences of physiography, or was it a difference between two *classes* of labor, plus the factor of physiography? In shorter terms: Was it a difference between free and slave labor, or was it a difference between white and negro labor? How much of that difference was due to slavery, and hence was of institutional responsibility, and how much was due to the negro, and hence was racial?

No writer on ante bellum Southern conditions, in so far as I now recall, whether considering their concrete manifestations only, or discussing the abstract cause of such manifestations, ever took account in specific terms of the factor of race. From De Tocqueville to Olmsted and Cairnes and the post bellum school, they constantly confuse racial status with race, and thus fail to differentiate between negro slave labor and white free labor. In its last analysis the economic argument of these writers was an attempt to establish the hypothetical dictum of Adam Smith, that the physical productivity of a man or group of men must necessarily be greater under a system of voluntary labor than under a system of controlled labor. In doing this they entirely ignored the economic force of racial differences. Their arguments and methods were probably justifiable as part of a social and political propaganda. But we can neither follow the one nor adopt the other in treating the question forty years after their object has been accomplished, and with an entirely different purpose in view. When these writers ignored the factor of race, and all but disregarded that of natural physical conditions, they ignored the only permanent elements in the Southern economic situation—the only factors sufficiently persistent to constitute an element of continuity in Southern economic history.

The negro was a negro before he was a slave and he remained a negro after he became free. I recall no sound economic argument against slave negro labor per se (aside from the system of slavery) which is not today equally as sound against free negro labor per se. There is scarcely a passage in the writings on the economics of slave labor which would not be rendered more accurate by substituting the word "negro" for the word "slave". Hinton Rowan Helper is one of the mainstays of anti-slavery economists and historians. Yet I have never known one to quote the post bellum statements which indicated the main purpose of his opposition to slavery to have been his desire to see the South rid of the retarding presence of the negro.

I believe that the only economic indictment which will hold against what is popularly called "slavery" will finally lie against the slavery system and not against slave labor. Though apparently hopelessly confused, the two are economically easily distinguishable. This distinction I suggested in the opening of this paper. Convict labor in 1907 is as much controlled labor as slave labor was in 1860. Convict labor may or may not be efficient in the manufacture of shoes in Massachusetts or in the growing of cotton in Mississippi. That is a question of fact. But however it may be decided, we do not have as a necessary corollary any valid conclusion whatever as to the effect upon the general economic welfare of either state of such a system of convict employment. The primary productive efficiency of a given class of labor under a given system of control is one thing; the larger economic results to the community or commonwealth of a general adoption of such a system is quite another and one in which the question of the original cost of the controlled labor is an element of first importance. The difference between the two is the difference between "slave labor" and the "slavery system". The slavery system was a temporary expedient for controlling and directing a certain class of labor. The system has disappeared, but the labor remains, and must be taken account of in the economic life of the South and of the country.

Second only to the erroneous conclusions into which we have been led through the confusing of slave labor with negro labor, and the failure to recognize the continuity of the influence of the latter factor in Southern economic history, are the fallacies arising from the failure of historians and economists to recognize the importance of the white factor. "Slavery" has loomed so large upon the horizon of Southern history that apparently it has obscured our view of both the negro and the white man. Cairnes laid down the propo-

sition that the existence of slave and free labor in the same community was "a moral impossibility . . . precluded by a cardinal feature in the structure of slave societies".⁵ He therefore disposed of five million white laboring people in the Southern States by consigning them to "a condition little removed from savage life", to use his own language. Yet what was theoretically a "moral impossibility" to the closet philosopher in Dublin, was a stubborn fact of every-day experience in the states which constituted the field of his over-sea speculations.

One of the chief problems before the student of Southern history is that of determining this question—the part played by white labor in Southern economic life. The evidence is clear enough that the white laborer's share in that life was far greater than was once supposed, but investigation has thus far barely touched the surface of the field. As yet we know only enough to know that white labor furnished a considerable percentage of the Southern cotton crop before 1861, just as we know that it is producing a heavy percentage of the same crop today—now probably more than one-half. We do know that the Southern industry which has made the greatest advance since 1870, the manufacture of cotton, is wholly dependent upon white labor for its development. We also know that the state which has exhibited the most remarkable increase in the production of raw cotton is the state which, above all others in the South, is dependent upon white labor for its growth. This is Texas, in which most of the cotton is grown by white labor, which contains the smallest percentage of negro population of any of the cotton states, which in fact calls itself a "white state", and which in 1906 produced more cotton than was produced by all the Southern States combined in 1860.

I have suggested that in discussions of slave labor per se, we might substitute the word negro and make a sounder argument. It is strikingly true that in pointing out the great economic advantages of free labor over slave labor, ante bellum writers were simply contrasting white labor with negro labor. Their arguments are good today if we only substitute the word "white" for the word "free". In 1861 Mr. Edward Atkinson wrote a pamphlet to demonstrate that cotton could be grown to better advantage by free than by slave labor.⁶ His entire argument is based upon the superior results accomplished throughout the South, chiefly in Texas, by white labor as against the labor of negroes. He thought he was

⁵ *The Slave Power* (third edition, 1863), p. 53.

⁶ *Cheap Cotton by Free Labor, by a Cotton Manufacturer* (Boston, 1861).

making an anti-slavery argument, while in fact he was simply giving unconscious recognition to the white factor, actual and potential, in Southern economic life. The title of his pamphlet was *Cheap Cotton by Free Labor*, which was misleading. It should have been "Cheap Cotton by White Labor".

But in riveting our attention upon slavery to the exclusion of all other factors in the South, we not only have failed to give credit to the Southern white laboring man, but we have also shifted wholly to an institution a responsibility which, if it is to be placed at all, should rest in large part upon the shoulders of another class of Southern white men.

If the white capitalist class devoted itself more to agricultural than to manufacturing or mining industries, slave labor should not be held to account. If larger use was not made of such labor, this was due either to individual judgment or to the fact that slave labor was negro labor, or to the slavery system, or to all combined. It cannot successfully be charged to the mere status of the laborer. Again, if the white planter did not require his slave labor to keep up his property, it was his fault and not that of either the labor or the system. Probably the most untenable argument ever urged against slave labor or against the slavery system was the popular one that it was responsible for the wasting of the soil. That was a common charge against all pioneer agriculture. Professor J. F. W. Johnston, probably the most scientific English student of agricultural economics who ever visited America, made precisely this charge against the wheat farming methods of New England and New York in 1849, which he described as "scourging the earth". He also declared that the white farmers in that section were growing corn after the same methods followed by the Indians two centuries before.⁷ Edmund Ruffin exposed the fallacy of the argument of the responsibility of slave labor for soil exhaustion in 1852. The two were related only in the respect that slave labor, being under control, could be handled with greater facility in all agricultural operations. It could as easily have been used in building up the soil as in wasting it, as was demonstrated time and again in localities throughout the South, and particularly in the agricultural revival in lower and middle Virginia.⁸ The "run down", impoverished and generally dilapidated appearance of most Southern plantations today, under free negro cultivation, should suggest that

⁷ *Notes on North America* (London, 1851), I. 355 ff.

⁸ Edmund Ruffin, *Address before the South Carolina Institute*, Charleston, S. C., November 18, 1852.

slave labor was not responsible for similar conditions fifty years ago.

I have suggested that in the matter of the course of immigration away from the South, the presence of the free negro since 1865 is as much entitled to consideration as a contributing cause as was the presence of slavery before 1861. But it has often occurred to me to question how far the South really desired foreign immigration before the Civil War. It is not possible to sustain the contention that the tide of immigration could have been turned positively to the South, or that the immigration which entered America through Southern ports could have been induced to settle permanently on Southern soil. It is none the less true, however, that the attitude of Southern white people toward the question of encouraging immigration, as a matter of public policy, is still an undetermined factor in its influence upon an economic condition heretofore ascribed wholly to the existence of slavery. This is equally true of the situation today. It may be answered that after all slavery was responsible, in that it influenced Southern public opinion on the matter of state or local aid to immigration. Certainly this is true of the presence of the negro in influencing the attitude of many Southern people today. Here again we have the persistence of the racial, the negro, factor in Southern economic conditions long after the passing of slavery. Many thoughtful people in the South are unwilling to run the risk of complicating their existing racial difficulties through the addition of a foreign element to the population. Indeed, it is safe to say that the only positive opposition to immigration which exists in the South is based upon this fear.

Finally, much might be said of the factor of physiography. Though too prominent to be wholly ignored, it is seldom given its proper weight. In the chapter on the Colonists and the Inferior Races in his last volume on *The English Colonies in America* (p. 243), Doyle says: "There is no feature of Colonial history with which moral and sentimental considerations have so closely combined themselves as the question of slavery. Yet there is hardly any which has been so largely determined by physical causes . . . so little by the deliberate volition of men."

The importance of such physiographical considerations in influencing the course of political and social history is nowhere better illustrated than in the economic history of Virginia. That state was dismembered and the state of West Virginia created purely as a political measure. But the economic aspect of that transaction lies far deeper and beyond the political events of 1861-1865. The

foundation for the latter is grounded in the facts of Virginia economic sectionalism—the barriers created by nature in the western part of the state against the slavery system as it was organized at the time. All the artificial conditions within the state—laws, dominant policy, political considerations—necessarily applied to the state as a whole, at least in so far as they could override physical obstructions. Yet in the counties of western Virginia the negro population decreased 1.8 per cent. in number between 1840 and 1860, while it increased 10.6 per cent. in the rest of the state. During the same period the white population of the West Virginia counties increased 75.1 per cent., while that of the other counties of the state increased but 28.6 per cent.

Thus were natural laws operating to divide slave labor from free, black population from white, and laying the foundation for the white state which was carved out of a black state in 1862. And thus Virginia in 1861, within the limits of her own economic sectionalism, epitomized and typified the larger economic sectionalism of the country as a whole, which had made possible the political sectionalism which in turn probably rendered inevitable a civil conflict at some period in our national development, whether it came through slavery or the tariff. As a result of the play of purely economic forces there was created in a Southern slave state a state just as thoroughly dedicated to "free labor", just as truly "free", as was any in New England. The same forces which made the North a white labor country had by 1861 cut the Southern States in part with a chain of white counties, which extended from the Pennsylvania line practically unbroken to the Mississippi River in Tennessee, to the Gulf of Mexico in Alabama, and to the Atlantic Ocean in Georgia. These same forces operate today, and in their processes we may read an explanation of much which we have formerly attributed to purely human or artificial agencies, rather than to natural laws.

In trying to reach the real causes which underlie the relative movements of negroes and foreign born—I mean the fundamental, persisting causes—we must be impressed with the force of conditions for which slavery was and is in no wise responsible. Here the study of the influence of comparative physiography assumes more than local importance. Though not within the province of this paper, I venture the suggestion that one of the most important studies yet to be made in the field of American economic history is that of the significance of the relative similarity of American and European physiographic conditions in affecting the course and final habi-

tation of the millions which Europe has contributed to the upbuilding of various regions in America, outside the South. In this connection, we may glance at the relative physical situations of our negro and foreign-born populations forty years after the passing of the institution which was once supposed to exercise almost absolute control over their respective movements.

How far racial antipathy and the presence of the negro were responsible, I shall not consider here, but certainly it was not chance and it was not slavery which in 1900 so distributed our population that while but little more than one-fifth of the total and less than one-sixth of the foreign born lived between 100 and 500 feet above sea-level, nearly one-half of the negro population lived between those altitudes. The percentages were 21.8 per cent. of the total, 15.5 per cent. of the foreign born, and 48.2 per cent. of the negroes. These percentages, furthermore, decreased between 1880 and 1900 for both the total and foreign born, while that of the negro showed an increase. And it should be borne in mind that differences of altitude are not dependent on sectional or geographical lines. Some of the highest peaks east of the Rockies are found in the Southern States.

So also with the movement when tested by distribution according to technical physiographic regions. The distribution of negroes shows an almost complete reversal of that of the foreign born. Of the latter 28.2 per cent. live in the New England hills region, which contains but 1.5 per cent. of the total negro population. On the other hand, 41.1 per cent. of the negro population lives in the coastal plain region, which contains but 1.7 per cent. of the foreign born.

In measuring the influence of temperature and rainfall, we find still further confirmation of the other results. In 1900, more than three-fourths (76 per cent.) of the foreign born lived in regions in which the mean annual temperature was between 45 and 55 degrees, more than seven-eighths between 40 and 55 degrees, and more than one-half between 45 and 50 degrees. Negroes, on the contrary, are found to be most numerous between 60 and 65 degrees (37 per cent.), while 83.7 per cent. of the total negro population lived between 55 and 70 degrees. Between 1880 and 1900 the foreign-born drift was toward lower temperatures, while that of the negro was toward higher.

The distribution according to mean annual rainfall showed that 82.6 per cent. of foreign born lived in regions with a rainfall of from 30 to 50 inches, while 90.8 per cent. of the negroes were found where it lay between 40 and 60. Only 1.6 per cent. of foreign born

lived where the rainfall was from 50 to 60 inches, and this proportion showed a declining tendency. Between the same limits of rainfall there lived 60.1 per cent. of the negro population, and this proportion had steadily increased since 1880.⁹

I submit these considerations with this reflection: It seems to me that a final recognition of the far-reaching influence of the play of natural economic forces suggests a broader view of Southern history. In this larger view we may see in the phenomena of Southern economic life the operation of a human nature common to the white population of the entire country, acted upon by economic conditions largely of nature's own creating, rather than a mere manifestation of peculiarities incident to an artificial and a perverted economic growth. I do not mean to insist that any one factor which I have suggested is entitled to the weight which I, individually, might attach to it. I do believe that, taken in their entirety, they constitute a group of influencing causes which cannot properly be disregarded in any comprehensive study of Southern economic history.

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⁹ *Geographical Distribution of Population*, bulletin 1, Twelfth Census, Washington, 1903.